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BALLADRY IN AMERICA¹

BY H. M. BELDEN

WHEN I first learned, about seven years ago, that genuine old British ballads were still alive in the hearts and on the tongues of old-fashioned folk in the State in which I was living, I hastened with all the enthusiasm of the novice to publish a plan² for the systematic collection and comparison, chiefly through the students in our schools and colleges, of all balladry in America. I knew very little of the work that had already been done in the same field, or of the controversy that had grown up concerning the nature and history of ballads; I had, indeed, no very strict notion of what a ballad might be; but it seemed to me that co-operative collection of traditional song from the mouths of the people would do more than anything else to resolve our doubts as to the origin of ballads, their special character if they had one, their relation to print, to social conditions, and to book poetry; and with the valor of ignorance I asserted that ten years might see the whole problem, so far as America was concerned, cleared up,—collections completed and conclusions drawn. Naturally, a closer acquaintance with the problem chastened my presumption. Seven of the ten years are gone, considerable effort has been expended, and there are still plenty of questions unanswered. I recall my early indiscretion here, only because the plan still seems to me in the main a right one. Considerable progress has in fact been made, and the value of co-operative collection has been demonstrated. Our Annual Meeting seems a suitable occasion for a review of the work of collectors in America since the completion of Child's work, with such inferences regarding the results that may be looked for from the study as our progress justifies.

¹ This paper in its original form was read as the President's address at the Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society in Washington, December 28, 1911. As here printed, however, it has been carefully revised and considerably supplemented by Mr. Phillips Barry, to whom the author is indebted for much of the bibliographical matter both in the text and in the notes.

² "The Study of Folk-Song in America," *Modern Philology*, ii, pp. 573 ff.

Balladry, in the wide sense of the term, is found to be restricted to no one part of America. North and South, East and West, new settlements and old communities, populous centres and sparsely peopled regions, seem almost equally to love and to have preserved traditional popular song. Perhaps the most surprising development in the period under review is the amount and quality of traditional balladry found by Mr. Barry in the New England and Middle States.¹ Nearly four years ago he printed a list of "Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States" that he had collected. It contains 84 items, 28 of which are forms of the ballads admitted to Child's collection. Doubtless it has been very much increased since that time; indeed, several new items have since been made public in the *Journal* and elsewhere. Mr. Barry has found these ballads not only in the woods and remote villages of Vermont and New Hampshire, where one might expect to find them, but likewise in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and close to the shades of Harvard and the Boston State House. Still farther up the coast ("down," I suppose I ought to say), in Nova Scotia, Professor Mackenzie has found a store of ancient British ballads, of which he has printed some interesting specimens, as well as a highly significant account of the status of ballad-singing there and of the provenience of the ballads.²

No less favorable to the perpetuation of ballads are conditions in the Southern States. In Professor Child's time, ballads had been reported here and there from Virginia and the Carolinas. A few from the Cumberland Mountains were published in the year 1893;³ six years later, two "poor buckra" ballads appeared in print;⁴ and in 1904, still other songs and ballads of the mountain-folk were made known to the world.⁵ In the following year a writer in the *Berea Quarterly* called attention to the notable prevalence⁶ of ballad-singing

¹ P. Barry, "Some Traditional Songs," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xviii, pp. 49-59; "Traditional Ballads in New England," *Ibid.*, pp. 123-138, 191-214, 291-304; "King John and the Bishop," *Ibid.*, vol. xxi, pp. 57-59; "Folk-Music in America," *Ibid.*, vol. xxii, pp. 72-81; "Native Balladry in America," *Ibid.*, pp. 365-373; "Irish Come-all-ye's," *Ibid.*, pp. 374-388; "The Origin of Folk-Melodies," *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 440-445; "A Garland of Ballads," *Ibid.*, pp. 446-454; "The Ballad of the Broomfield Hill," *Ibid.*, vol. xxiv, pp. 14-15; "Irish Folk-Song," *Ibid.*, pp. 332-344; "New Ballad Texts," *Ibid.*, pp. 345-350; "The Ballad of Earl Brand," *Modern Language Notes*, vol. xxiv, no. 4, pp. 104-105.

² W. R. Mackenzie, "Ballad-Singing in Nova Scotia," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxii, pp. 372-381; "Three Ballads from Nova Scotia" (*Child*, 4, 46, 81), *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 371-380.

³ L. W. Edmunds, "Songs from the Cumberland Mountains" (*Child*, 85), *Ibid.*, vol. vi, pp. 131-134.

⁴ C. E. Means, "A Singular Literary Survival" (*Child*, 12, 73), *The Outlook*, Sept. 9, 1899.

⁵ E. B. Miles, "Some Real American Music" (*Child*, 79), *Harper's Magazine*, 1904, pp. 118-123.

⁶ "Mountain Minstrelsy," *The Berea Quarterly*, April, 1905, pp. 5-13.

in Kentucky, and printed three typical folk-songs. Professor Henne-man, at the meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1906, read eight old ballads recorded from tradition in North Carolina; in 1907 Professor Kittredge published in the Journal a very instructive sheaf of ballads gathered by Miss Pettit in Kentucky,¹ and in 1908 a ballad from West Virginia.¹ In the next year, Miss Bascom published in the Journal a collection of "Ballads and Songs of North Carolina."² In the year 1910, J. H. Combs published a fine specimen of Old English balladry from the Cumberland Mountains.³ Later, at the meeting of the Modern Language Association, came the announcement by Professor Shearin that he had collected in that region over a hundred traditional songs, about thirty of them ballads of British origin.⁴ He has now just published⁵ a list similar to that of Mr. Barry, comprising "337 titles, exclusive of 117 variants," of traditional songs gathered in central and eastern Kentucky, 21 of them being versions of ballads found in Child.

In the Southwest, Mr. J. A. Lomax has devoted himself with great success to the collection of a special type of popular song, — or, rather, of the popular song of a special occupation, — that of the cowboy. His "Cowboy Songs,"⁶ published last year, contains many of the pieces found in Professor Shearin's list, and still more of those in the Missouri list presently to be described. It shows, I believe, only one of the ballads in Child;⁷ but, as it is professedly only a selection from Mr. Lomax's gathering, it is safe to assume that the whole collection, when published, will show a larger number of the old ballads. As it stands, however, "Cowboy Songs" is a very valuable contribution to ballad study. It is drawn not simply from Texas, but from the cowboys of the South and West as far as New Mexico and Montana.

A considerable collection has also been made in Missouri since 1904, of which a partial list,⁸ containing 145 titles, was printed last year. Checking up the collection a few days ago, I found that it contained 347

¹ G. L. Kittredge, "Ballads and Rhymes from Kentucky" (*Child*, 53, 68, 73, 84, 243), *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xx, pp. 251-277; "Two Popular Ballads," *Ibid.*, vol. xxi, pp. 54-56.

² L. R. Bascom, "Ballads and Songs of Western North Carolina," *Ibid.*, vol. xxii, pp. 238-250.

³ J. H. Combs, "A Traditional Ballad from the Kentucky Mountains" (*Child*, 74), *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 381-382.

⁴ H. G. Shearin, "British Ballads in the Cumberland Mountains," *Sewanee Review*, July, 1911, pp. 312-327.

⁵ "A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs," *Transylvania University Studies in English*, ii, Lexington, Ky., 1911.

⁶ *Cowboy Songs*, collected by John A. Lomax, New York, 1910.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110 (*Child*, 278).

⁸ *Song-Ballads and Other Popular Poetry Known in Missouri*. Printed for the Missouri Folk-Lore Society, Columbia, Mo., 1910.

more or less distinct pieces, besides 293 variants. Only 18 of them are versions of ballads found in Child; a much larger number are descended from British (English, Scotch, Irish) broadsides and stall ballads. Most, though not all, of them have been found in Missouri; some are from Arkansas, some from Illinois, a few from other States.

In the North Central States no great amount of traditional song has been collected. A few ballads from Ohio and Illinois were published by Mr. Newell in 1900.¹ Professor Beatty of Wisconsin presented at a recent meeting of the Modern Language Association eight old ballads that had come to his hands, all but one of them, however, from Kentucky;² two years earlier a pupil of his had secured from a Scottish woman visiting in Wisconsin versions of four of the ballads in Child.³ Miss Louise Pound of the University of Nebraska has made an effort to collect ballads in that State, and has a considerable number; but most of them, she tells me, were learned outside the State,—in Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Colorado. Professor Tolman of Chicago has collected some versions. Dr. H. S. V. Jones of the University of Illinois printed one from that State (learned by his informant in Virginia) in a recent issue of the *Journal*.⁴ The number, however, of the ballads in the Missouri collection that are reported to have been learned in Illinois or Indiana from thirty to sixty years ago, and Professor Miller's recollections⁵ of "play-party songs" in the latter State in his boyhood, convince me that ballads are still to be found there, if one knew where and how to look for them.

The Pacific coast has contributed only two;⁶ but no one familiar with the conditions of traditional popular song in New England, Kentucky, and Missouri, and with Professor Lomax's account of the cowboys' poetry, will be able to persuade himself that a region that was pioneer country of the most romantic description fifty years ago, and has since then been the home of the highwayman, the hunter, the lumberman, and, above all, of the miner, is without its quota of traditional balladry. Several of the pieces in the Missouri collection are the direct result of the movement that peopled California in 1849.

And what is this traditional popular song that has thus been gathered

¹ W. W. Newell, "Early American Ballads" (*Child*, 12, 93), *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xii, pp. 241-255; vol. xiii, pp. 105 ff.

² Arthur Beatty, "Some Ballad Variants and Songs" (*Child*, 4, 53, 84), *Ibid.*, vol. xxii, pp. 63-69.

³ Arthur Beatty, "Some New Ballad Variants" (*Child*, 26, 27, 40, 181), *Ibid.*, vol. xx, pp. 154-156.

⁴ H. S. V. Jones, "Robin Hood and Little John" (*Child*, 125), *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 432-434.

⁵ "The Dramatic Element in the Popular Ballad," *University of Cincinnati Studies*, Ser. II, vol. i (1905), pp. 30-31.

⁶ Mrs. R. F. Herrick, "Two Traditional Songs" (*Child*, 2), *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xix, pp. 130-132.

by students from Nova Scotia to New Mexico? Frankly, it is a very heterogeneous collection. Of the hundreds of pieces having some claim to separate identity, Mr. Barry has reckoned up fifty-two as being American representatives of ballads admitted by Child to his collection.¹ The rest are of the most varied character and content, having only this in common,—that they are popular song existing in oral tradition. The Missouri collection is, I believe, typical of all the rest, save that it lacks the parodies of recent book-poetry that make up so large a part of the cowboy's repertory in Mr. Lomax's book; and I shall therefore give here a brief analysis of it.

Of the eighteen ballads in the collection that are found also in Child, all but two have been printed in the Journal.² It does not appear that they belong to any special order of balladry. Most of them are simple ballads of romantic tragedy ("The Pretty Golden Queen" [4], "The Old Man in the North Countree" [10], "Thomas and Ellender" [73], "William and Margaret" [74], "The House Carpenter" [243]), or of a sentimental cast ("Lord Lovel" [75], "Barbara Allen" [84]); one ("Black Jack Daley" [200]) is romance without a tragic outcome, at least in the imperfect version that has come to hand; one ("The Jew's Garden" [185]) is a relic of mediæval calumny of the Jews; one ("Georgia" [209]) is the story of the efforts of a horse-thief's wife to rescue her husband from the gallows; three ("The Yellow Golden Tree" [286], "Shipwreck" [289], "Andy Bar-dan" [250]) are ballads of the sea; one ("The Cambric Shirt" [2]) is a riddle ballad; one ("Bangum and the Boar" [18]) tells of a fight with a monstrous boar in whose cave lie "the bones of a thousand men;" one ("The Lone Widow" [79]) is a ballad of mother-love and the visiting spirits of the dead; and two ("Dandoo" [277], "A Woman and the Devil" [278]) are *fabliaux*.³ Naturally there are no "border ballads;" we are too far removed in time and place for anything so locally British. Neither are there any heroic ballads, in Professor Hart's sense of the term. Ballads in Missouri are sung, not said, and very seldom (those corresponding to ballads in Child's collection, never) have epic breadth. Indeed, the most noticeable facts about these eighteen ballads are all negative facts. One of them is that themes repulsive to our moral sensibilities are dropped. There is

¹ *Child*, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 13, 18, 20, 26, 27, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 53, 68, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79, 81, 84, 85, 93, 95, 105, 106, 110, 125, 155, 162, 181, 188, 200, 209, 210, 214, 221, 243, 250, 274, 277, 278, 279, 281, 285, 287, 289, 295.

² "Old-Country Ballads in Missouri" (*Child*, 4, 10, 18, 73, 74, 75, 84, 155, 200, 243, 277, 278), *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xix, pp. 231–240, 281–299; vol. xx, p. 319 (*Child*, 209); "Three Old Ballads from Missouri" (*Child*, 2, 79, 286), *Ibid.*, vol. xxiii, pp. 429–431.

³ The titles given are those by which the ballads are known in Missouri. The corresponding numbers in *Child* are given in brackets.

nothing like "Lizzie Wan," "Sheath and Knife," or "Child Waters." Even among the *fabliaux*, apparently, lewdness is taboo. Another is that ballads which in their British forms present more or less distinctly supernatural elements lose these elements in America. The Elf-Knight of the British ballad has become just a seducer and murderer of royal maidens, who at last meets his match and gets his deserts; it is Margaret herself, not a ghost or a dream, that comes to William and stands at his bed's feet; it is the returned lover, not his ghost or the devil in the lover's form, that entices the House Carpenter's wife away from husband and child to perish at sea when the ship has "sprung a leak." Simple human tragedy unadorned with picturesque superstition is all that is left of these ballads in Missouri. The one exception is "The Lone Widow" ("The Wife of Usher's Well"), which of course would lose all significance as anything but a story of the returning dead. Even a bit of old superstition has been preserved in the last stanza of this:

"The tears you have shed, my mother dear,
Would wet our winding-sheet."

But this ballad seems to be almost extinct; only after some years of investigation was any one found in Missouri who knew it. The third generalization that may be made about these ballads is that they tend to lose the full ballad style. There is a certain modicum of ballad commonplaces (often misplaced), and there are traces of incremental repetition, but nothing like the artistic sequences and climaxes of "Edward," "Child Waters," or "Babylon." Not that they are in the style of the broadside or the ballad hack,—they are as guiltless of the vulgarizing particularity of Buchan's blind beggar as they are of the banal moralizings of the typical broadside,—but they are worn, withered, shrunk almost to the skeleton of their former beauty, even when all the essentials of the story are preserved.

It is merely for convenience that I have described these eighteen ballads found in Child as though they were a distinct division of the popular song of Missouri. As a matter of fact, they are only a portion, though probably the oldest portion, of a much larger body of romantic narrative preserved in oral tradition. Of these I shall endeavor to present some leading types.

The themes are largely those of the broadside balladry of the last two centuries in England. A favorite is that of the returned soldier or sailor lover. This is represented by a number of pieces,¹ all of them known as stall ballads in England in the last century. They range in style from the rude simplicity of "Young Johnny,"—which, despite its reference to Ireland, smacks strongly of Wapping Old Stairs,—

¹ Ten of them were printed under the heading "Popular Song in Missouri—The Returned Lover," in *Herrig's Archiv*, vol. cxx, pp. 63 ff.

through the vulgar sentiment of "The Soldier Boy," "William Hall," and "The Banks of Claudy," and the vulgar tragedy of "The Faultless Bride," to the gentle harmlessness of "Mary and Willie" and the polite parlor atmosphere of "Willie's on the Dark Blue Sea." "Young Johnny" has more of the ballad manner than any of the printed versions known to me:

Young Johnny been on sea,
And Young Johnny been on shore,
And Young Johnny been to Ireland
Where Young Johnny been before.

"You are welcome home, Young Johnny,
 You are welcome home from sea,
For last night daughter Molly
 Lay dreaming of thee.

"Oh, what for luck had you, Young Johnny,
 Oh, what for luck had you on sea?"
"I lost my ship and cargo
 All on the roaring sea.

" Go bring your daughter Molly
And set her down by me,
And we'll drownd the melancholy
And married we will be."

"Molly is not at home, Johnny,
Nor hasn't been this day;
And I am sure if she was, Johnny,
She would not let you stay.

"Molly's very rich, Johnny,
.
.
. "

Young Johnny feeling drowsy
He hung down his head,
And he called for a candle
To light him to bed.

"The green beds they are full, Johnny,
And have been for this week;
And now for your lodging,
Poor Johnny, you must seek."

He looked upon the people,
He looked upon them all,
He looked upon the landlord
And loudly he did call,

Saying, "How much do I owe you?
I'm ready for a call."

"It's twenty for the new score
And forty for the old."

Then Young Johnny he pulled out
His two hands full of gold.

.

"I did n't speak in earnest,
Neither was I just,
For without any exception
She loves you the best."

Then Molly came a running down,
Gave him kisses one, two, three;
Saying, "The great bed is empty,
And you may lie with me."

"Before I would lie in your green bed
I would lie within the street;
For when I had no money
My lodging I might seek.

"Now I have money plenty, boys,
We will make the taverns herl [*howl?*]
A bottle of good brandy
And a better looking girl!"

Another favorite theme is that of the girl who follows her lover — generally a soldier or a sailor — disguised as a man. Of the almost countless variations upon this theme that have been circulated by British ballad-printers since Mary Ambree's time, "Jack Munro" has lasted best in Missouri. The versions of it in our collection show interesting stages of historical and geographical confusion. In one, Mollie's father is "a wealthy London merchant;" Jack is drafted to "the wars of Germany," he goes to "old England," and the wedded pair return from Spain to "French London," wherever that may be. Another version has the merchant still in London, but (perhaps by association with the mention of Spain) has Jack, now become a farmer, drafted into the army "for Santa Fé," where he is cut down by "a bullet from the Spaniards." In still another version the transference to America, though vague, is complete. The wealthy merchant "in Louisville did dwell;" Jack "has landed in New Mexico, in the wars in Santa Fé;" whereupon Mollie "harnessed up a mule-team, in a wagon she set sail [a prairie schooner, evidently], she landed in New Mexico on a swift and pleasant gale," where presently "the drums did loudly beat and the cannon's balls did fly," and Mollie rescues her lover as

before. "William Taylor" — whose sweetheart follows him in disguise, finds that he has married another woman, and shoots him dead — is also known in Missouri; and a third piece, in which the heroine, disguised as a boy, follows her lover the captain, shares his bed without revealing her sex, and marries him next morning.

In most of the printed ballads on the Female Soldier (or Sailor) theme, emphasis is laid upon the contrast between the heroine's tender beauty and the rough offices she must perform. In "Jack Munro" this takes the form of a dialogue which may be said to be the poetic core of the piece:

"Your waist is slim and slender,
Your fingers they are small,
Your cheeks are red and rosy
To face a cannon-ball."

"I know my waist is slender,
My fingers they are small,
But I have a heart within me
To face a cannon-ball."

No printed ballad that I have seen has developed this motive in so ballad-like and effective a fashion. The nearest approach to it is in certain forms of a popular farewell dialogue between the sailor or soldier and his sweetheart, often printed by the broadside press, and represented by what I might call "The Nut Brown Maid" of our collection. William must leave for the wars. Polly begs him to stay with her; if he will not, she says, —

"My yellow hair then I'll cut off,
Men's clothing I'll put on;
I'll go 'long with you, William,
I'll be your waiting man.
I'll fear no storm or battle,
Let them be ne'er so great;
Like true and faithful servant
Upon you I will wait."

Whereupon ensues the following dialogue: —

"Your waist it is too slender, love,
Your fingers are too small,
I'm afraid you would not answer
If I should on you call
Where the cannon loudly rattle
And the blazing bullets fly,
And the silver trumpets sounding
To drownd the deadly cry."

"My waist is not too slender, love,
 My fingers not too small,
 I'm sure I would not tremble
 To face the cannon-ball
 Where the guns are loudly rattling
 And the blazing bullets fly,
 And the silver trumpets sounding
 To drownd the deadly cry."

"Supposing I were to meet with some fair maid,
 And she were pleased with me,—
 If I should meet with some fair maid,
 What would my Polly say?"
 "What would I say, dear William?
 Why, I should love her too,
 And stand aside like a sailor
 While she might talk with you."

The last test having been thus satisfactorily met, William straightway marries her, and now together they are "sailing round the main." The stanzas which this piece shares with "Jack Munro" are probably borrowed by the latter, since they do not appear in the British prints of "Jack Munro," whereas an inferior form of them does appear in British prints of the "Nut-Brown Maid" dialogue.

Another favorite theme, both of the ballad press and of traditional song in Missouri, is that of the man who entices the girl he has promised to marry away from human help, either to the forest or to the water-side, and there kills her. Familiar stall-ballads upon this theme are "The Wittam Miller," "The Gosport Tragedy," and "The Bloody Brother." The forms of it found in Missouri are most like "The Wittam Miller;" they have no ghost, and they characteristically avoid the motive of incest; yet they are often in other respects close to "The Bloody Brother" both in temper and in language. Most widely known is "The Jealous Lover" (so it is generally called; but it is known sometimes by other titles, — "Abbie Summers" in Pike County, "Emma" in Bollinger County, "Down by the Drooping Willows" in Lafayette County, and in Scotland County as "Florilla," which is a variant of the names under which it has been found by Mr. Barry in New Hampshire, and by Miss Pettit and Professor Shearin in Kentucky). "The Jealous Lover" might be described as "The Bloody Brother" with the motives of incest, "double murder," and supernatural detection of the crime left out, and an elegiac note introduced. It commonly begins, —

One evening when the moon shone brightly
 There gently fell a dew,
 When out of a cottage
 A jealous lover drew.

Says he to fair young Ellen,
 "Down on the sparkling brook
We'll wait and watch and wonder
 Upon our wedding day."

In the next stanza they have evidently wandered some distance, for she asks to be taken home. But he has already drawn his knife, and, despite her pleadings and assurances of faithfulness, into her

fair young bosom
He splunged a daggered knife.

And now

Down yander in the valley
Where the violets are in bloom,
There sleeps a fair young damsle
All silent in the tomb.

Another piece, which has come to me without a title, is a reduction of "The Wittam Miller." He takes her out for a walk, knocks out her brains with a fence stake, and throws her body into the mill-pond; and when, upon his return home, his mother asks him how he got blood on his clothes, he answers that it came from "bleeding at the nose." Still another form is "Pretty Oma,"¹ which opens in quite the characteristic ballad style:

"Come jump up behind me and away we will ride,
Till we come to Squire Gardner's and I'll make you my bride!"

She jumped up behind him and away they did ride,
Till they came to deep waters by the river's divide.

Thereupon the lover beats her into insensibility, and drowns her "just below the mill-dam."

It would hardly be worth while here, even if it were possible, to list and classify all the items in the collection that seem likely to have been derived, meditately or immediately, from the printed ballads of the Old World. Many of them have lost any distinct narrative content and become mere popular lyrics, most often of disappointed love, lacrymose or rebellious. Others are remembered only as fragments. Some, in the form in which they have been taken down, are compounded of many simples, — broken memories strung together in unconscious or half-conscious poetic joinery by a process familiar enough, however little understood, to students of balladry. It is impossible to say, for instance, how many different pieces the collection contains upon the theme of the Forsaken Girl, because so many of them seem to be merely individual or temporary composites of imperfect memories. A few old favorites, not yet mentioned, which hold their story

¹ Two versions of "Pretty Oma" have been recorded by Miss Pettit in Kentucky (see Kittredge, "Ballads and Rhymes from Kentucky," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xx, pp. 265-267).

pretty well, are "Kate and her Horns," "Dog and Gun," "The Driver Boy," "The Soldier's Wooing" (i. e., "The Masterpiece of Love-Songs"), "The Silvery Tide," "Mary of the Moor," "Johnny Sands" (in two forms), and "Darby and Joan;" and the Irish ballads of "William Reilly," "Ranordine," "The Croppy Boy," "Brennon on the Moor," and "St. Helena."

Besides the representatives of Old World balladry so far considered, there is a considerable number of what may fairly be described as American ballads. Some of them, to be sure, are plainly derived or adapted from British vulgar ballads, but they have been so far made over as to have acquired a perceptibly American coloring. I shall speak first of those that seem not to have had, or to have lost, any definite historical connection, and later of those the origin of which can be ascribed to known political or industrial movements.

Two domestic tragedies may be mentioned first. "Little Orphan McAfee" is quite in the spirit of English and Irish gallows-pieces; but I do not know it in print, and suppose it to be of American origin among immigrants of the ballad-loving sort. McAfee was piously reared by an uncle, but, refusing good advice, married a wife, then fell in love with another woman, poisoned and strangled his wife, and is now awaiting his end upon the gallows. More clearly American is "Sons of Columbia" (otherwise "Fuller and Warren"), — the story of a girl who, having promised herself to one of her two suitors, throws him over and marries the other, whereupon the rejected kills the accepted lover and is sentenced to death. This piece always closes with a warning against the wiles of "fickle-minded maids," for

Woman has always been the downfall of man
Since Adam was beguiled by Eve.

"Fair Fannie Moore" is, so far as I know, an American product, though it would not surprise me to find that it came from Ireland. Fannie rejects the advances of the rich and haughty Randal, and marries Edward, a youth of low degree. Randal finds her alone one day at her cottage, and gives her the choice of yielding to his love or dying on the spot. She chooses the latter alternative. Later Randal is caught and

hung in chains on a tree beside the door,
For taking the life of the fair Fannie Moore.

There is a crudely literary tone about this piece, which yet has not prevented its being pretty widely current as a "song-ballad." No such charge, however, can be brought against "The Silver Dagger," which tells of two lovers parted by hard-hearted and worldly parents, of the girl's wanderings, despair, and final suicide, of her lover's ar-

rival in time to catch her last words, bidding him

“Prepare to meet me on Mount Sion
Where all our joys shall be complete,”

and of his following her example in self-destruction; still less against “The Butcher Boy,” whose forsaken sweetheart goes upstairs and hangs herself with a piece of rope. This ballad — known, I believe, all over the country — is an example of a kind of composition frequently represented in British stall-ballads, but not, I think, the work originally of writers for the ballad press; rather, I believe, printed from oral tradition because it is already known and liked and will sell. It has the incongruity found in some traditional versions of “Barbara Allen,” of beginning as a story told by the heroine herself, and passing unconsciously to the narrative of her hanging herself and being cut down by her father.

American in origin and currency are “Springfield Mountain” and “Young Charlotte.” The former — the story of a young man bitten in the hay-field by a rattlesnake — originated, according to the investigations of Mr. Newell, in Colonial times in Massachusetts;¹ but it has lost any local significance in the two forms of it known in Missouri. The latter, a favorite from Nova Scotia to Oklahoma, was composed, Mr. Barry believes, by a rural poet named Carter, in Vermont, about two generations ago. It has, however, no marks of time or place beyond such as are inherent in the tragic motive, — a young girl, taken by her lover to a Christmas or New Year’s dance in a distant town, freezes to death by his side on the way, because she would not wrap herself in a blanket and hide her fine clothes. Unlike the Returned Lover or the Female Soldier theme, unlike even the Americanized “Butcher Boy” or the American “Springfield Mountain,” this ballad is essentially the same wherever it is found. Not only certain striking or significant stanzas, as in the case of “Black Jack Daley” and “Jack Munro,” but others, of merely reflective or descriptive character, hold their place, with slight verbal changes, from Canada to the Southwest. For example, the opening stanzas, —

Young Charlotte lived on a mountain side,
In a wild and dreary spot,
There were no other dwellings for five miles round
Except her father’s cot.

And yet on many a winter’s night
Young swains would gather there,
For her father kept a social board
And she was young and fair, —

¹ W. W. Newell, “Early American Ballads,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xiii, pp. 105–112; P. Barry, “Native Balladry in America,” *Ibid.*, vol. xxii, pp. 365–373.

far as they are from what we think of as the "ballad manner," are as persistent as the more vivid and ballad-like —

"O daughter dear," her mother cried,
 "This blanket around you fold,
For 'tis a bitter night abroad;
 You'll catch your death of cold."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" young Charlotte cried,
 And she laughed like a gipsy queen,
"To ride in a blanket all muffled up
 I never will be seen," —

or those containing the tragic centre of the story, —

"Such a dreadful night I never saw;
 My reins I scarce can hold" —
Young Charlotte faintly then replied,
 "I am exceeding cold."

.

Spoke Charles, "How fast the freezing ice
 Is gathering on my brow!"
And Charlotte still more faintly said,
 "I'm growing warmer now."

"Young Charlotte," by virtue of its wide currency, the absence in it of a distinctly "vulgar ballad" or "popular ballad" style, and its persistency of form in spite of what appears to have been exclusively oral transmission, constitutes perhaps the most interesting and problematical phenomenon in American popular song.

History as such, ballad students have long since observed, soon fades out of popular song. War and politics are too remote and complex in their originating motives, too transitory in their bearing upon individual experience, to maintain themselves in balladry. Few traces of song-ballads dealing with American history before the Civil War have been preserved in Missouri. "Marching to Quebec," which Weston described as a favorite amusement of rural Americans eighty years ago, is still remembered as a "play-party" song. An incident of the War of 1812 is preserved in "James Bird," and the battle of New Orleans in "Packingham." At least one widely-known song must have had its origin in a famous battle, — "The Texas Rangers," which, despite its mention of Indians and the Rio Grande, is surely an echo of the great fight at the Alamo on March 6, 1835.

I'm a Texas ranger,
 I know you know me well.

About the age of sixteen
I joined that jolly band,
We marched from Western Texas
Down by the Royal Grande.

Our captain he informed us,
Perhaps he thought it right,
“Before we reach the station,
Brave boys, we’ll have to fight.”

I saw them Indians comin’,
I heard them give the yell,
My feelings at that moment
No human tongue could tell.

Our bugle it was sounded
And the captain gave command:
“To arms, to arms!” he shouted,
“And by your horses stand.”

I saw the dust arisin’,
It seemed to touch the sky,
My feelin’s at that moment,
“Oh, now’s my time to die.”

We fought them full nine hours
Before the strife gave o’er,
And like the dead and wounded
I never saw before.

Five hundred noble rangers
That ever trod the West,
Now dyin’ in the evenin’
With bullets in their breast.

Certain resemblances suggest that this was modelled on the British ballad “Nancy of Yarmouth.”

The Civil War had its quota of camp-ballads as well as of pathetic and sentimental songs, but few of them can be said to live in tradition at the present day. The collection I am describing has a considerable number — rambling narratives of the fight at Springfield, of Sterling Price’s cavalry exploits, of the Vicksburg and Gettysburg campaigns — bearing sufficient internal evidence of having been composed and sung around the camp-fire and on the march; but they come mostly from manuscript ballad-books of war-times or shortly after, or at best from the memory of old soldiers. Somewhat more persistent are the sentimental ballads; for instance, “When this Cruel War is over,” which, it may be remarked in passing, found its way to the London stalls, having been printed by Such with the heading “Weeping Sad and Lonely, A Song on the American War.” “The Guerrilla

Boy," sung presumably in the camps of the bushwhackers (it is preserved in a manuscript ballad-book compiled in the seventies), is merely an adaptation to the life of the Missouri guerrillas of a British stall-ballad entitled "The Roving Journeyman."

New social conditions and industrial movements come closer to the consciousness of the common people than do war and politics; at least, so one would infer from our song-ballads. "The Hunting of the Buffalo," originally an emigrant's song, and frequently printed by the British ballad press in the last century, persists as a children's singing-game. "Pretty Maumee," a song of the frontiersman's Indian sweetheart, probably preserves in its title and refrain the name of the Miami tribe of Indians. The rush for the California gold-fields in 1849-50 gave birth to "Joe Bowers," which everybody knows, and to its less familiar counterpart, "Betsy from Pike;" also to two soberer song-ballads, "Come All Ye Poor Men of the North" and "Since Times are so Hard." A later mining-fever produced the mournful tale of "The Dreary Black Hills."

Those picturesque frontiersmen of the very recent past, the cowboys, had, as Mr. Lomax has shown, a considerable poetry of their own; and some of it has become part of the traditional song of Missouri. The two best-known of the cowboy-songs are "The Lone Prairee" and "The Dying Cowboy." Both, it is worth remarking, are adaptations of pieces that had originally nothing to do with cattlemen or the Western plains. "The Lone Prairee" is "The Ocean Burial," a sailor's ballad of uncertain authorship, that has been current in New England for about two generations, made over to meet cowboy conditions. In the original the dying sailor begs that he may not be buried in "the deep, deep sea," where the sea-snake will hiss in his hair, and the billowy shroud will roll over him; in the Western adaptation the dying cowboy begs that he may not be buried "on the lone prairee," where the rattlesnakes hiss and the coyote will howl over him. "The Dying Cowboy" has a less reputable origin, being a plainsman's version of an Old World, possibly Irish, soldier's ballad known as "The Unfortunate Lad."¹

The career of Jesse James made a deep impression upon the popular imagination in his native State, and is recorded in a widely-known ballad in which his exploits of robbing the Gallatin bank and holding up the Danville train are celebrated.² The chief emphasis, however,

¹ G. F. Will, "Songs of Western Cowboys," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxii, pp. 258-259; J. A. Lomax, *Cowboy Songs*, p. 74; P. Barry, "Irish Folk-Song," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiv, p. 341.

² L. R. Bascom, "Ballads and Songs of Western North Carolina," *I. e.*, p. 246; J. A. Lomax, *Cowboy Songs*, p. 27. In the latter volume are versions of other song-ballads current in Missouri: to wit, "The Lone Prairee," "Joe Bowers," "Texas Rangers," "Love in Disguise," "Fuller and Warren," "Sam Bass," "MacAfee's Confession," "The

is laid upon the treachery of Robert Ford, the Ganelon to this band of outlaws:

It was Robert Ford,
That dirty little coward,
I wonder how he does feel;
For he ate of Jesse's bread
And slept in Jesse's bed,
Then laid poor Jesse in the grave;

and the refrain goes, —

That dirty little coward
That shot Mr. Howard¹
And laid poor Jesse in the grave.

Jesse James has had, so far, no successor who can dispute with him the title of bandit hero in Missouri. But song-ballads of untraced authorship continue to appear and to pass into oral circulation. There is one on the murder of Garfield; one on "The Iron Mountain Baby," a child thrown out by its mother, in a hand-satchel, from a train on the Iron Mountain Railroad, and found and brought up by one of the railroad men; and, by no means the least interesting, one upon the wholesale murder of the Meeks family by the Taylor brothers, cattlemen, in Sullivan County, about twelve years ago.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of "godly ballads" in Reformation times and the presence of certain old biblical pieces in Child's collection, it is customary nowadays to think of ballads as dealing only with secular themes. No such predisposition governs the singer of song-ballads in Missouri. "The Romish Lady" (sometimes "The Roman Lady"), whose popularity is attested by several copies from different localities, is a piece of aggressive Protestantism that carries us straight back to the Book of Martyrs. The Roman lady has somehow got hold of a Bible and come to realize the wicked idolatry of the Popish religion. Her mother upbraids her, tries to force her back into submission, and, failing in this, hands her over to the Inquisition, by whom the girl is burnt at the stake, calling upon God with her last breath to receive her soul and to "pardon priest and people" for their blindness. Another religious ballad, known as "The Little Family," tells the story of the raising of Lazarus. Others are rather doctrinal than epic. One of these presents the terrors of damnation with a vigor not unworthy of Michael Wigglesworth, and must have been a valued ally of the preacher in his long and losing fight against cards, dancing, and other wiles of the Devil. It exists in two forms, — one for man, and one for maid. That for maid begins, —

"Dreary Black Hills," "Jack Munro," "Fannie Moore," "Young Charlotte," "Betsy from Pike," "Rosin the Bow," and "Springfield Mountain."

¹ The assumed name under which James was living when he was shot.

Death is a melancholy call,
 A certain judgment for us all;
 Death takes the young as well as old
 And lays them in his arms so cold.
 'Tis awful — awful — awful.

I saw a youth the other day,
 He looked so young, he was so gay;
 He trifled all his time away
 And dropped into eternity.
 'Tis awful — awful — awful.

But that for maid will be sufficient:

THE WICKED GIRL

Young people hear and I will tell,
 A soul I fear has gone to Hell;
 A woman who was young and fair,
 Who died in sin and dark despair.

Her tender parents oft did pray
 For her poor soul from day to day
 And give her counsel, good advice,
 But she delighted still in vice.

She would go to frolics, dance and play,
 In spite of all her friends could say;
 "I'll turn to God when I am old,
 And then he will receive my soul."

At length she heard the spirit say:
 "Thou sinful wretch! forsake thy way;
 Now turn to God, or you shall dwell
 Forever in the flames of Hell."

"No, I'm too young," thus she replied,
 "My comrades all would me deride."
 The spirit then bade here farewell,
 And thus consigned her soul to Hell.

It was not long till Death did come
 To call this helpless sinner home;
 And while she was on her dying bed
 She called her friends and thus she said:

"My friends, I bid you all farewell.
 I die, I die, I sink to Hell!
 There must I lie and scream and roll,
 For God will not receive my soul!"

"My tender parents," she addressed,
 "I hope your souls will both be blessed;

But your poor child you now may see,
But soon shall be in misery.

"My weeping mother, fare you well!
The pains I feel no tongue can tell!
Dear Parents, your poor child is lost,
Your hopes they are forever crossed."

These are not hymns, but religious song-ballads. One more may be mentioned, "The Railroad to Heaven."¹ It was perhaps composed for revival meetings of railroad-men, but is certainly not restricted to them. By a quite elaborate allegory, the process of salvation is presented under the figure of a railway journey in which Christ is the engineer. The piece exists in widely varying forms.²

I fear that I have exhausted your patience with this long account of a not very inspiring collection of popular song. I shall therefore pass over the "play-party" songs,³ the riddles, the sectional satires, and the few items of negro song contained in it, and devote a few minutes at the close to pointing out some of the problems that arise, and the way in which co-operative collection may help, and has helped, in their solution.

Upon the general and basic problem of classification — the question whether we shall classify ballads according to intrinsic qualities of tone, style, and structure, or according to theories (more or less insusceptible of demonstration) as to their origin, or according to their known history and vogue — the work of collection in America will throw, perhaps, little direct light. But it may be expected to throw considerable light upon certain problems preliminary to the solution of the general problem, and chiefly upon these: —

- I. The relation of print and manuscript to oral tradition.
- II. The interrelation between oral tradition and the "popular ballad" style.
- III. The origin of "authorless" balladry.
- IV. The function of music in the origin and perpetuation of ballads.
- V. The social and geographical distribution of ballads.

I. Hogg's mother I believe it was who protested that when ballads were reduced to print they were killed; and Professor Gummere seems to be of the same opinion. But Professor Mackenzie's investigations

¹ Several religious song-ballads have appeared in print from time to time, describing the Christian's way to heaven under the similitude of a railway journey or a voyage on shipboard.

² Religious song-ballads are current in North Carolina. See Emma M. Backus, "Early Songs from North Carolina," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xiv, pp. 286-294.

³ Mrs. L. D. Ames, "The Missouri Play-Party," *Ibid.*, vol. xxiv, pp. 295-318.

in Nova Scotia point to the importation of printed ballads from Scotland as an important element in the perpetuation of ballads in that region. Professor Shearin tells me that country newspapers bear a part in the dissemination of song-ballads in Kentucky;¹ and I have found that Trifet's *Monthly Budget of Music*, and such printed collections as "The Forget-Me-Not Songster" and "Old Put's Songster," have been known and used — in one case used up — in Missouri. Even the stall-ballad is not unknown. I have seen a copy of "The Wicked Girl" printed on a small sheet, "price five cents," in the possession of a negro washerwoman.² Moreover, the fact that a great many of the "vulgar ballads" recorded from tradition in New England, Kentucky, and Missouri — though commonly declared by the singer to have been learned, not from print, but from the singing of another — are yet to be found in the output of the nineteenth-century ballad press in London, is certainly not without its significance. Of the importance of manuscript copies, in the form either of single ballads or of ballad-books, in preserving and spreading popular song, there can be no question. These are not the work of scholars and antiquaries, nor, like Mrs. Brown's manuscripts, written out at the request of scholars and antiquaries, but rather, like the Percy Folio, the simple ballad-lover's method of securing and preserving the ballads that he likes. Curiously enough, they are very often just the ballads that are most frequently found in the output of the Seven Dials presses; showing apparently that it was easier to write out a desired ballad, whether from oral rendering or from print, than to get another printed copy.

These facts suggest that the function of print and handwriting in the perpetuation of what the singers themselves commonly think of as purely traditional song has been underestimated, and should be further looked into. On the other hand, there are some ballads that seem to owe nothing to print. The most striking case is that of "Young Charlotte," already mentioned. It was composed, as Mr. Barry's investigations have led him to believe, about seventy-five years ago in Vermont, and was probably carried by its author to Ohio and Missouri, where his wanderings as a Mormon took him. In these and other States it is pretty widely known, with surprisingly little variation in matter or manner; and there is nothing to show that it ever circulated in print.³ If its stability of form, as compared with

¹ Even city newspapers maintain a folk-singers' exchange, —"Notes and Queries," in the *Boston Transcript*; "Everybody's Column," in the *Boston Globe*; and "The Forum," in the *Philadelphia Press*. Many excellent ballad texts have thus been preserved.

² Stall-ballads were printed in Boston by N. Coverly in the first decade of the nineteenth century; during the latter half of the century, broadsides in great numbers were published by DeMarsan, Wehman (New York).

³ Since this was written I have seen it in a newspaper clipping (from *Good Stories*, undated, but comparatively recent). This print of it, however, is clearly the effect, not the cause, of its traditional circulation.

"Jack Munro" or "The Jealous Lover," owes nothing to print, then it is an evidence of the faithfulness of oral tradition even in the nineteenth century; and the further inference is suggested, at least to those familiar with the printed balladry of the last century, that variation and decay may be due rather to print than to oral transmission.¹ None of the ballads taken down from oral tradition in Missouri show as incoherent a jumble as do some of the patchwork ballads issued by Such and Pitts and Catnach and their kind. Evidently there is still much to be learned concerning the part played by print in the perpetuation and variation of ballads, and the way to learn it is to trace back from present conditions.

II. "Young Charlotte" is also very instructive in regard to the relation existing between oral tradition and the "popular ballad" style, as we have now learned to define it. Mr. Barry is himself presenting to you to-day his conclusions as to "communal re-creation" in this ballad, as he has formerly done in the case of "The Lone Prairee," and I shall not repeat them here; but I may add that a good deal might be found in support of his position in other ballads in the collection described, especially those that have their originals (or counterparts) in printed balladry. The American traditional versions of these ballads have commonly more of the ballad style than the printed versions. There is, of course, always the possibility, in the case of such a poem as "Young Charlotte," that the changes in the direction of the "ballad style" are due simply to the presence, in the people's repertory, of old ballads to which the new are unconsciously assimilated; in other words, that "communal re-creation" explains, not the origin of the ballad *style*, but why traditional ballads assume that style. Even so, the doctrine, if confirmed by a number of well-developed cases, will go far to set at rest the controversy that has raged so long about the talismanic words *das Volk dichtet*.

III. The problem of the origin of anonymous and apparently authorless popular song can be studied to special advantage in living, contemporary instances. Take, for instance, the song-ballad of "Jesse James." Everybody (loosely speaking) knows it; nobody knows where it comes from. It is as authorless and traditional as "The Two Sisters" or "The Demon Lover." But it is only a few years ago that the events it celebrates happened. Can it not be traced from one living singer to another up to its source? Or take the still later ballad of the Meeks murder, which happened about a dozen years ago. Miss G. M. Hamilton informs me that half her class in the Kirksville Normal School know the piece; most of the people who lived at the scene of the tragedy are living there still; a cousin of one of her pupils

¹ Of course it is not meant that the ballads were purposely altered, but only that the versions printed by the ballad press seem often to have been supplied by persons who did not fully know or sympathize with the true ballad tradition.

helped pull the dead bodies from under the haystack. Yet the piece is already an authorless ballad,—as much so, apparently, as any of the old British ballads. Has it "jes' growed," like Topsy, or is it the work of some obscure rhapsodist like Carter of Bensontown? Surely these questions can be answered, for a ballad whose whole history lies within the memory of those who now sing it, with a completeness and detail impossible for ballads that come down from earlier generations.

IV. Our fourth problem, the function of the melody in the origin, spread, and development of ballads, has received far too little attention from students of balladry in this country. The ballad in its true estate is sung or chanted, not spoken, still less read; certainly in America it is always a "song-ballad." Without the tune, a ballad is indeed "a very dead thing;" and ballad-lovers generally, I suppose, make up a sort of chant, as I do, for ballads that come to them without a tune. The ballad demands it. Yet too many of us attempt to study the development of a ballad, or the relation of one ballad to another, merely from the written words, with no knowledge or thought of the melody with which those words were winged. For the older records this procedure is often inevitable, inasmuch as the air of a ballad was seldom set down in manuscript, and in broadsides was indicated by a name which the reader might or might not be able to interpret. But in contemporary balladry the melodies may be studied in living relation with the words — how fruitfully, let Mr. Barry's papers in recent numbers of the *Journal* bear witness.¹ It is true that music is less circumscribed than words, and may be transferred from one ballad to another; it is true also, unfortunately, that many enthusiastic ballad students are unable to put the tune on paper along with the words. But at least the tune is there for those able to record it. And from the study of this ballad music we may confidently look for much light upon the genesis, perpetuation, and mutation of ballads. What, for instance, is the limit of variation of a ballad tune before it loses its identity? How does the same ballad come to be sung to quite different tunes? Is the tune more persistent in the case of a ballad that has spread only by oral tradition than in the case of one that has circulated only in ballad print? What part has the melody, traditional or improvised, played in the formation of new ballads out of fragments of old ones? How does the same ballad come to have widely different refrains? To the answers to these significant questions, all who can record the music of our living song-ballads, whether by the ordinary notation or by phonograph, can contribute.

V. And finally, the co-operative study of living balladry is sure to enlarge our knowledge of the social and cultural conditions from which

¹ See the articles listed in Note 1, p. 2, especially those on "Folk-Music in America" and "The Origin of Folk-Melodies."

ballads spring, and under which they flourish. We shall learn whether a given ballad is an inheritance from the days of the first settlers, or came in with immigrants in the nineteenth century; whether it is of English, or Scotch, or Irish provenience. If it is of native origin, we shall find, as Mr. Barry has done in the case of "Young Charlotte," into what parts of the country it has travelled, and why; perhaps even the particular people or sort of people, and the particular geographical paths, by which it has travelled. We shall find what, if any, special types of balladry thrive in particular regions, or among special occupations or classes of people. We shall be able to check, by first-hand, living, verifiable evidence, theories regarding the essential conditions of balladry that have been derived in great part from fragmentary, sometimes prejudiced, sometimes ignorant, and in all cases now dead and unverifiable evidence of past centuries.

It is clear, I think, that the solution, or even an advance toward the solution, of the problems here reviewed, will be of the highest value in solving the general and basic problem,—the definition and classification of ballads. A good beginning has been made, but it is only a beginning. Some regions have scarcely been touched, none have been exhausted. Believing, as I do, that the spirit of balladry is not dead or dying, but as immortal as romance itself, I cannot incite collectors, as ballad-lovers have been doing for the last century, with the cry of "Now or never;" but I can and do urge upon all who care for ballads and ballad problems the value of the collection of living balladry in America.

NOTE.—*The Publication of Ballads.* To make the investigation of ballads in this country effectively co-operative, it is of course necessary that each collector's findings should be available, for study and comparison, to all other students of the subject. As has been shown, a considerable body of ballads—largely versions of those included in Child's collection—has already been printed in the Journal and elsewhere; but it is scattered through many issues, and the sum of it is but a fraction of the significant material that has been gathered. For three of the collections, lists of titles, with brief descriptions of the pieces included, have been printed. These are helpful, and have contributed not a little to the progress of the work; but they are not adequate. In the study of a subject so elusive and complex as balladry, nothing can take the place of the texts themselves. It is therefore much to be wished that a way might be found of getting together and publishing in a single work, with so much classification as may be feasible and with an exhaustive index, all the traditional balladry known in America. Such an undertaking would involve much labor, and could not be expected to bring a monetary return to the publishers; but it would doubtless find, like the "Wordsworth Concordance," workers ready for the task; and it would be richly worth while from the point of view of scholarship, of criticism, and of social history.